



ELEPHANT MEN

STACK was all ears when we sat down with Colin Farrell and Danny DeVito to discuss Disney's latest live-action redux, Tim Burton's *Dumbo*. **Words** Gill Pringle



Tim Burton's 2010 live action re-imagining of Disney's animated classic *Alice in Wonderland* sold more than US\$1 billion in tickets, kicking off a rush of similar revivals, followed by Jon Favreau's *Jungle Book*, Bill Condon's *Beauty and the Beast*, and Kenneth Branagh's *Cinderella*.

Today the movement comes full circle with Burton returning to the helm, directing one of Disney's most cherished stories, *Dumbo*, eight decades after the tiny flying elephant won hearts in the 1941 animated original.

The main character of Jumbo Jr. was cruelly nicknamed Dumbo as in "dumb", although Burton's version expands on the themes of celebrating differences; the loveable circus orphan – ridiculed for her oversize ears – finding a loving new family in Colin Farrell's widowed, one-armed war veteran and his two children.

DeVito stars as circus master Max Medici, while Michael Keaton plays a slick entrepreneur

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who recruits the peculiar pachyderm for his own circus enterprise, Dreamland, which soon becomes a nightmare.

Reuniting the visionary director with DeVito and Keaton for the first time since 1992's *Batman Returns*, *Dumbo* also features Burton favourite Eva Green as a fearless aerial artist.

When STACK meets with the cast in West Hollywood, Farrell, a father-of-two in his own life, talks about how he immediately identified

with his character of former circus star and recent amputee, Holt Farrier.

"Emotionally and psychologically, he's not the man he once was when he returns from World War I to a world he doesn't recognise. His children were maybe four or five years old when he left for the front line and since then his wife has passed and he doesn't know his own children; he doesn't know how to be as a father.

"So Holt's personal journey is to forgive himself and his own guilt and shame for not being there. I think, as parents, sometimes our biggest shortcoming is pretending that we know exactly how to do it. So I think Holt's lesson in the film is that it's okay not to know how to be a parent, sometimes you just gotta be there and observe your children figuring it out for themselves," says Farrell.

The same lesson, he says, might apply to the circus' initial harsh reaction to Dumbo and his

MORE LIVE ACTION DISNEY ON THE WAY...

ALADDIN

Guy Ritchie is directing, but don't expect this version to feature guns and geezers. Will Smith is the blue Genie, Mena Massoud plays Aladdin, and Naomi Scott is the Princess Jasmine. Alan Menkin provides the score, featuring new recordings of the original songs plus a couple of new ones. In cinemas on May 23.



THE LION KING

"Hakuna Matata!" Director Jon Favreau did a marvelous job with *The Jungle Book*, so no worries here. The mighty all-star voice cast includes Donald Glover as Simba, Beyoncé as Nala, Chiwetel Ejiofor as Scar, James Earl Jones as Mufasa (reprising the role from the animated film), and a Billy Eichner and Seth Rogen double act as Timon and Pumbaa. In cinemas on July 18.



Disney movie. I have three kids, so I got to later on expose them to this wonderful story of xenophobia, which is something that you want to teach your kids about because it exists in the world," says the 4' 10" actor who had a small role on Burton's *Mars Attacks!*

"When something's different than you are, and you want to make fun of it, or you just don't know how to deal with it – you bully it, or you are mean to it. And then there's the whole thing of the mother being separated from her child. And unfortunately, that is something that still happens all over our world, but never more prevalent than it is at this moment with this current insanity..." he says when we meet at the same time as Trump had begun separating immigrant children from their parents.

Like Burton, DeVito is drawn to flawed characters and outsiders. "It's more about the duality of Tim's characters. Like, there are flaws in Medici. I'm a good guy. I took care of Holt's children while he was in the war. My circus is like a family and I try to take care of everybody.

It's very Marxist," says the actor whose character is quickly seduced by Keaton's proposals.

"It's not until the evil Michael Keaton enters that I sell; that I do go with the glitter. I drink the Kool-Aid of capitalism, if you will, because I do take my troop to Dreamland. I want better things for them and believe that everyone is going to be better off because somebody's dangling a little bit of money in front of my face. But then Medici

learns it the way we learn it in life, and it winds up biting him in the ass."

DeVito never fails to marvel at Burton's work. "I watch him work and he's an artist. He paints with the visuals that are available to him so you become part of his paintbox, part of the colour that he's using. It's like he is using you as an element, an implement, a thing, but with all the humanity and explanation, because we talk about it constantly beforehand."

Filmed at Pinewood Studios in the UK, Burton himself has often been described as the ultimate circus master, celebrated for his taste in the bizarre and fantastical.

Unaccustomed to Burton's grand scale of filmmaking, Farrell describes his awe upon walking onto the Dreamland set the first time. "They'd built it in an aircraft hangar used to make Zeppelins. But then the set went up like three or four storeys, with all these lights flashing and popcorn stands, with 400 extras, about 12 horses, eight Model T Fords from the early 20th century and about 40 different carnies juggling and balancing things on their heads. I just walked in, and thought, 'What the...?' And my eyes literally watered, it was so beautiful."

For the Burton newbie, signing on for *Dumbo* was easy. "Honestly, when I heard the words 'Tim Burton' and 'Dumbo', I just thought, 'Oh my god, that sounds like such a beautiful marriage of visual artist, filmmaker with material and character and theme and legend'"

➔ *Dumbo* is in cinemas on Mar 28

huge ears. "Dumbo arrives in the story initially as something that needs damage control, as something that we all judge. Even the circus people, when we see the ears first, it's kinda 'What the hell?' and we know that it's probably not gonna be taken too well by society, by the community that come to watch our circus.

"It's not the cute little doting perfect baby elephant that Danny's character thought he was buying. But what seems to be a handicap or cause for derision at the start of the film is actually a cause for celebration and is something that, bit by bit, throughout the telling of the story, awakens the spirits of each of the characters," says the actor whose films include *The Lobster*, *In Bruges* and *Total Recall*.

Delighted to work with Burton again, DeVito, says, "This is our fourth movie together so that was very exciting. I played a very similar part in *Big Fish*."

DeVito has cherished *Dumbo* since childhood. "From the time I was a little boy, Dumbo was very emotional and heartfelt for me. I was totally taken by the 63-minute

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